

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CARRIGKERRY BOGS NHA

SITE CODE: 002399

Carrigkerry Bogs NHA consists of two upland blanket bogs that are both located within 2.5 km of the village of Carrigkerry, Co. Limerick. Carrigkerry is located south of the Shannon Estuary, approximately 6 km north-west of Newcastle West. The bogs are situated within the townlands of Knockaunnagun and Knockfinnisk. The altitude at Knockaunnagun is 170 m to 180 m, while Knockfinnisk is slightly higher at 240 m. Bedrock geology of Knockaunnagun is millstone grits and flagstone, while that of Knockfinnisk is coal measures.

Both sites are very interesting examples of an unusual bog habitat, one that is intermediate in type between a raised bog and a upland blanket bog.

Of the two bogs, the bog at Knockfinnisk shows least disturbance, although there is evidence of localised burning in one corner. The site has a domed appearance, rising slightly to the centre. The vegetation is relatively intact, with a thin, marginal zone along the road where old cutover has re-vegetated. Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) occurs in the wet margins. Another zone of old cutover bog on the south side of the site suggests that, at its centre, the bog reaches at least 2.5 m in depth.

The intact vegetation at Knockfinnisk has a hummocky appearance with Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) colonising hummocks of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) is abundant across the surface of the bog and there are numerous cushions of the lichen *Cladonia portentosa*. Also occurring are Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*). The large, mossy hummocks consist mostly of *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *S. papillosum* but hummocks of the locally important *S. fuscum* also occur. The locally rare species, Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) adds further to the conservation value of the site. While there are no bog pools, there are abundant wet hollows with bog mosses (*Sphagnum auriculatum* and *S. cuspidatum*) with frequently occurring Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*).

The bog at Knockaunnagun is also dome-shaped and is up to 2.5 m deep at its centre. Both old and more recent peat cutting has reduced the area of intact bog at this site. On the uncut bog, Ling Heather dominates the vegetation, growing only to about 20 cm high. The moss *Hypnum jutlandicum* is abundant underneath the Ling Heather. Both cottongrass species occur and Bog Asphodel is abundant. While wetter patches support stands of White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) the bog surface is relatively dry overall. The bog moss component (*Sphagnum* spp.) does not exceed 20% and is restricted to the occasional hummock of *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*, and *S. subnitens*. The locally important bog moss, *S. fuscum*, occurs occasionally. The cutover areas around the edge of the bog are wetter with abundant bog moss and flushed areas.

At both sites, evidence of Red Data Book species, Irish Hare and Red Grouse are plentiful. Also occurring are Snipe, Meadow Pipit and Fox Moth.

The predominant land use at Knockaunnagun is peat cutting. Much of the bog has been lost to cutting while dumping is also occurring in the drains at the peat face. Peat cutting has led to a drying of the bog and a disturbance of the peat surface close to the cut face, resulting in significant changes to the vegetation. There is also abundant evidence of clay pigeon shooting on the cutover areas. At Knockfinnisk, there is less evidence of recent peat cutting but a more significant threat may come from the possible expansion of plantation forestry onto the edges of the site. Burning may also pose problems at Knockfinnisk.

Carrigkerry Bogs NHA is a site of high conservation value consisting of upland blanket bog with characteristic features and notable species of flora and fauna. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. The most extensive areas are found in Ireland and Britain. Upland blanket bogs, due to their exposure to severe climatic conditions at high elevations, are particularly vulnerable to erosion by human activities and extensive areas are currently undergoing active erosion due mainly to overgrazing. The current area of intact upland blanket bog in Ireland represents only a fraction of the original resource, due to the combined impacts of afforestation and overgrazing, and intact examples are therefore extremely valuable for nature conservation. Their long-term survival requires sensitive management.